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The Making Of
JIMI HENDRIX:
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From Beyond
The Grave

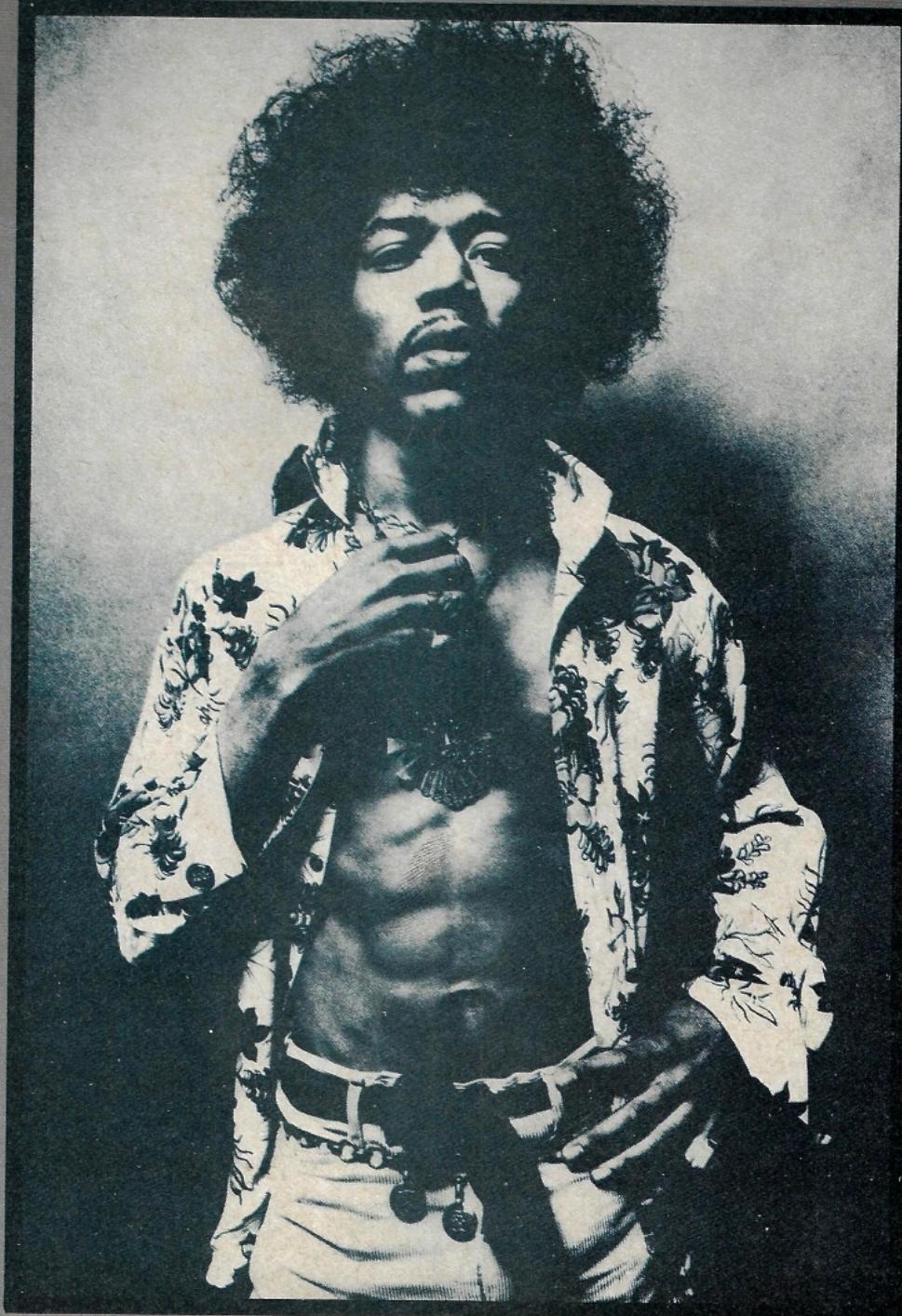
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The Discovery Of JIMI HENDRIX

A discussion with Chas Chandler

by Chris Welch

(It's now three years since his death, but the vision of Jimi Hendrix may be harder to ignore now than it was in 1968. Albums have continued to flow as if by schedule, and it appears that the continuing attention devoted to the man has attracted a substantial audience who probably never saw him perform. Warners has just released a film documentary by Joe Boyd, John Head and Gary Weiss, and the market turnabout of recent years is amply indicated by the fact that the soundtrack was released months in advance of the film itself. The following is a chapter from HENDRIX, a biography recently published by Flash Books. Its author, Chris Welch, is an Editor at Melody Maker, the widely-read British weekly. — B.E.)

It is doubtful if Chas Chandler had any idea his first discovery would have such impact and become such an integral part of the incredible boom in rock music that was to come. In 1966 Jimi Hendrix was just a Greenwich Village jammer and Chas was quitting music, believed destined for obscurity.

In 1972, a year after the death of Hendrix, Chas was still using his energy and Newcastle shrewdness to push rock talent, managing the affairs of a successful chart band, Slade, assisted by colleagues from the Animals, John Steele and Hilton Valentine.

"It's about time somebody wrote the truth about Jimi after all that crap that has been said," Chas explained how he came to meet Jimi, who was unknown in both Britain and America.

"I came into contact with him through Linda Keith who was Keith Richard's girlfriend. She had heard I was going into record production and told me there was a guy in the Village who was great. I met her and we went to see him working with drums and bass in the Cafe Wha in the Village. Before we saw him play, Jimi and I sat and talked. I wanted to take him back to England even before I heard him play. He was about 23 — that was in 1966 — and I was 28.

"The Animals had just started our last American tour and it was late July. Jimi didn't just say: 'Yeah, man, I'll come over to England.' He was worried about the equipment we had in England

and what the musicians were like. One of the first things he asked me was if I knew Eric Clapton. I said, sure I knew Eric very well and that I saw a lot of him socially at that time. He said: 'If you take me to England will you take me to meet Eric?' I told him that when Eric heard him play he would be falling over to meet Jimi, and that clinched it.

"After we talked, he played. Of course he didn't do anything like the act the Experience became famous for, but there were things there we later exag-

gerated. He was playing the blues and he didn't do any singing. He was very hung up on his voice, and he didn't think he could sing at all.

"In the meantime I'd found the song 'Hey Joe' by Tim Rose and wanted to record it. When I saw Jimi at the cafe I never mentioned it to him, but that was the one song he actually played all night. I thought it was kind of a signpost. Incidentally, Jimi had another guitarist with him that night, Randy California, who was then 15 and who

Chas Chandler (center) with the Animals circa 1964.



UPI Photo

later went on to join Spirit. Actually I didn't want him in the band because he was just playing down home blues and I felt with Jimi there wasn't room for another guitarist. And I saw Jimi playing in a different way.

"Jimi wasn't known at all at this time, but I hadn't any doubt in my mind. To me he was fantastic. I thought there must be a catch somewhere. Why hadn't anyone else discovered him? He was calling himself Jimmy James at the time but his real name was James Marshall Hendricks. Actually I can't remember if we changed his name from Hendricks to Hendrix, but Jimi we changed, from Jimmy. We wracked our brains trying to think of a name for the group and we didn't find The Experience until we found Mitch and Noel. Jimi had a few doubts about the name, but I said that soon it would take on a different meaning.

"I finished the tour with the Animals and the rest of the group went back to England while I stayed on in New York. We had to arrange a passport and find his birth certificate, which took a few weeks. We sat out five weeks, lurching



around the Village together. He was working there backing people and I'd watch him to get ideas. I'd always been a science fiction freak and had a book which I told him to read. It was called *Earth Abides*. It really turned him on to science fiction, and that's where a lot of his lyrics come from.

"He was still worried about coming to England though. He'd never been abroad before except with the Army. He'd been a paratrooper, and I think they flew him to Spain, dropped him out, picked him up and flew him home to New York.

In September, 1966, we arrived in England. One the plane he had been worrying how his American style of playing would fit with English guys, so I decided when we got to London Airport to drive to Zoot Money's, which was on the way into town. I thought if he met



Zoot it would dispel his fears about English musicians.

"We arrived at Zoot's house at 11 a.m. and Jimi started jamming for two or three hours. The house was full of musicians and it made him feel he could settle in England. He took to Zoot like a fish to water. He booked into the Hyde Park Towers hotel and started to meet all the other musicians in London.

"Two weeks after we arrived in England I was in our offices in Gerrard Street. A kid came in and asked if he could audition for lead guitar with the new Animals. But the place was already filled. I told him we needed a bass guitarist to work with Jimi. I lent him my bass and told him to go and meet Jimi and jam a bit to get to know him. He played bass for the first time and Jimi liked what he played. Jimi said: 'I think we've found a bass player.' And Noel said: 'I'll switch to bass. I don't see anybody else playing lead guitar with this bloke.'

"Noel was broke and I had to lend him five bob to get home. Then I heard that Mitch Mitchell had been kicked out of the Blue Flames (Georgie Fame's band). I liked his drumming and asked Mitch down. The first time all three of them got together they played non-stop for four hours.

"We went down to Blaises club where Brian Auger was playing. Jimi sat in and Johnny Halliday saw him. He asked if Jimi had an outfit because he was doing a tour of France and wanted another group. So their first appearances were on tour with Johnny Halliday. I was already fixing a deal with a record company when Kit Lambert (co-manager of the Who) saw Jimi play at the Scotch Of St. James. Kit nearly knocked all the tables over in the Scotch and wanted Jimi to be on the new label he was launching — Track. We made a deal that we would release the first record on Polydor, then join Track which was not starting up until March.

"After we made the first record I took it to Decca but they turned it down. The A&R man who turned it down told me: 'I don't think he's got anything.' The record was 'Hey Joe'. I took it straight over to Kit and he said:

'If there's any trouble distributing I'll take it round the shops myself.'

"When we came back from France, things were very quiet. It was very hard to get work and no one would touch him. I was fast running out of money. I had six guitars and I sold five of them to pay for a reception at the Bag O'Nails. I invited all the promotion men down to try and get some work.

"He played at the Bag and Phillip Hayward, who was running some clubs, asked him for £25 as a support group to the New Animals.

"I think the gig was at Croydon. From then on Jimi never looked back and got regular work. I went to every gig and we spent an hour discussing it afterwards. He was still working out the act that was to become famous.

"At Croydon on that first gig I think the audience was shocked. Their reaction wasn't excitement — I think they were numb! They weren't sure what it was about. Next we got a gig at the Roundhouse in Chalk Farm. Jimi got his guitar nicked and I was flat broke, so I had to sell my last guitar. I swapped my last bass for a new guitar for Jimi. Two days later 'Hey Joe' hit the chart. It was all done by the skin of my teeth. The deejays hadn't been playing it on the radio, but the word had spread through the ballrooms, and it started to sell. I think we had about thirty shillings left between us.



"My partner Mike Jeffery had disappeared. He hadn't even seen Jimi. He managed the Animals, and when I left them he was supposed to be my partner. As 'Hey Joe' rocketed up the chart, Jimi began playing off some bookings at all the top London discos. In November he played at Blaises, and he wrote 'Purple Haze' while he was waiting to go on in the dressing room at the Upper Cut."

Was Jimi excited by all these events?

"Excited? Yeah. But Jimi never changed, all the time I knew him. Those London club dates were fortunate because everybody came to see him including Jagger and Jones and the Beatles. They all went around telling people about the cat playing guitar with his teeth."

It wasn't long after his first hit single that Jimi found himself involved in one of the last of the old style pop package tours that his kind of music and stage act would eventually make obsolete.

"Dick Katz was the agent. He got the tour for us and I rubbed my hands. He was on the same bill as the Walker Brothers, and I knew they were going to split up after the tour. They were supposed to be the big sex idols of the time, but we knew Jimi would cop all their reputation. So we worked on this big flamboyant sex act. One night we would do a sexy routine and the theatre managers would get on to the tour manager and tell him to clean up his act. When somebody from the circuit came round I'd whisper in Jimi's ear to cool it."

How did the famous guitar burning episode develop on the opening night of the tour?

"We were sitting around in the dressing room trying to think of something new to put in the act. I think it was Keith Altham's idea to set fire to the guitar. Jimi had been doing a number called 'Fire,' and Keith said wouldn't it be great if he could start one. So we sent the roadie out to buy a tin of lighter fuel. We had to make sure it wasn't too obvious.

"I sprayed it on his guitar, but when the moment came, the matches kept going out! Jimi was lying on his back, striking matches for five minutes.

"There was a tremendous row back stage afterwards, with the theatre manager demanding the guitar for evidence.

"For the rest of the tour they didn't take too kindly to us. John Walker was a bit of a big head and he would waltz into our dressing room and say: 'I don't want any upstaging tonight. Who do you think you are?'

"There was a lot of ill feeling backstage, and they would screw up the lights, or put the house lights up on the audience during his act. It was quite a tour. There were no barriers in pop then, no pseudo-hippies. It was all entertainment and a great tour for the audiences."

Was Hendrix' 'wild man' image thus totally fabricated?

"When we saw how audiences reacted to him, we followed it up. We didn't deliberately set out to do it, but when the glossy magazines picked up on him it created an incredible amount of press.

"Jimi had a ball, he loved it. It was then it dawned on him he could be successful and that he could do something big and lasting. It was then he got his confidence. If you didn't know him it would seem he had no lack of confidence, but he was always very nervous and I had to talk to him before every show and tell him people really did like him. The best thing was he seemed to be able to talk to the audience. Before, if an amplifier broke

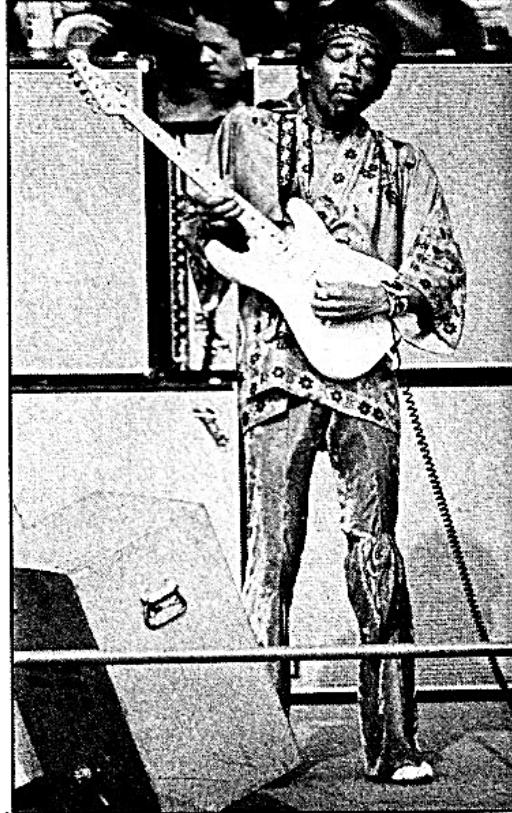
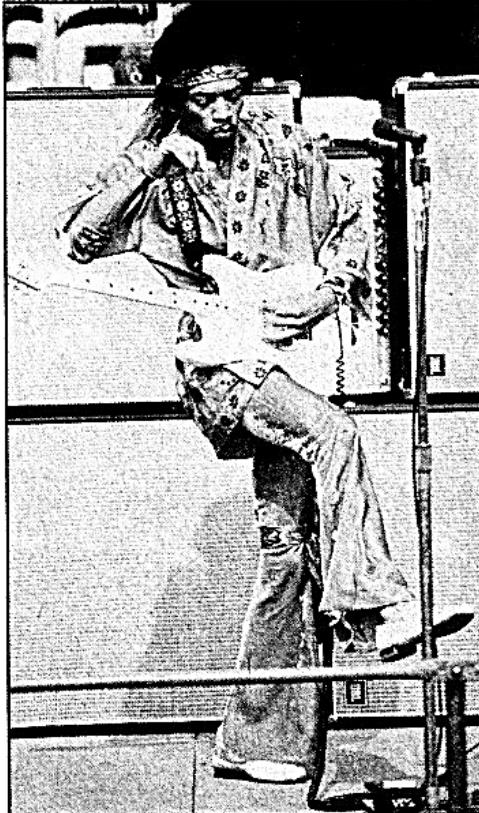
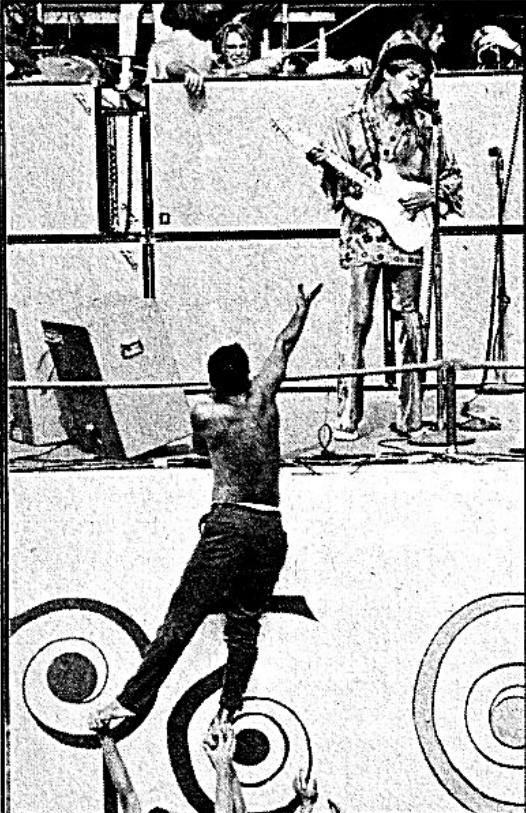
down on stage he wouldn't be in total control but the first night he played at the Saville Theatre in 1967 with the Who his amplifier caved in and he started talking and chatting up the audience.

"The amps went wrong because of the pounding he gave his equipment. He was using feedback as an integral part of his music. The best sound he got was with Sunn amplifiers in America. But after six weeks he shook them to pieces. I never saw anyone else use feedback the way he did. He'd have two strings feeding back and he'd play melody on another two while he was singing...

"Jimi didn't get it from Pete Townshend. The only guitarists he had heard before he came to England were Eric Clapton and Jeff Beck. He wasn't really aware of what Pete was doing with feedback because the Who hadn't really made it big in America at that time. He was into feedback, but nobody gave him credit for what he was doing so he didn't know he was doing impossible things!

"Then came Monterey. We got a 'phone call from John Phillips of the Mamas and the Papas who was helping to organise the festival. Paul McCartney had been over helping him and McCartney said it wouldn't be a pop festival without Jimi. It was the first festival of its kind ever held. Brian Jones flew over specially to introduce Jimi on stage. They had met when Jimi first came to England and were good friends. They

Photos by Neal Preston-Andy Kent, World Features





used to go to the Crazy Elephant club a lot, and Brian was one of the first to rave about Jimi.

"We all realised something big was going to happen at Monterey. It was such a good idea and it could only have been done through the goodwill of the artists. They sent us a first class air ticket, and there we were in Monterey with Otis Redding and the Mamas and Papas and 7,000 fans in front of an enormous stage. They had never heard of him. But there was an air of expectancy backstage from the people who had heard the rehearsals. He went on stage and created a sensation. The first couple of numbers were slow. Then they did 'Rolling Stone'. The audience went berserk, we let off smoke bombs and his guitar caught fire. The Mamas and Papas had to follow him and it took thirty minutes to quiet the audience down.

"I was in the lighting box at the back during his act and it took me 25 minutes to get through the crowd backstage. When I got there, all Mike Jeffery was doing was tearing the group off a strip because they had broken a 150 dollar mike stand. But Bill Graham came over and asked us if we would like to play the Fillmore West with Jefferson Airplane. So from Monterey we went to San Francisco. Meanwhile Mike had gone to New York and he 'phoned to say he had pulled off a deal for a great American tour with the Monkees. He said the Monkees were what was happening. I hung up. We played the Fillmore and Bill Graham gave us 2,000 dollars each as a bonus when the Airplane cried off the rest of the gigs after our first night. Bill also gave us antique engraved watches. Bill has had a lot of mud slung at him, but he's a gas.

"We went back to New York and Mike Jeffery was jumping up and down, saying he had pulled off a great deal. We all sat looking at each other. I said it would be a disaster, and I wouldn't go. But Mike had signed the deal and it was

too late. I told the boys I wouldn't go with them on the tour.

"They went — and died the death. I met Dick Clark who was promoting the tour and said we had to think of something — Jimi couldn't play to a bunch of 12 year olds. Dick said he would let them off the contract, so we put out a story about the Daughters Of The American Revolution waging a campaign to get him banned. But as far as we knew nobody from the Daughters Of The American Revolution had ever seen him, and most of the audience were young kids who didn't understand him anyway.

"Then Frank Barsalona came along from Premiere Talent in New York. He put on a concert in New York's Central Park with Jimi and the Young Rascals. Jimi didn't blow the Rascals off stage, but he was given a tremendous reception. We got seven more dates as a result. *Are You Experienced* went up the LP chart, and we came back to England."

What sort of changes did this bring about upon Jimi?

"He started drinking quite a lot. At first he never drank much: three whiskies and he was happy. Jimi lived with me for two years and I would never presume to say I knew him. Nobody knew him. He never seemed to confide in anybody. But at the time there was never any sign of strain, except for his drinking. I think he was just enjoying the delights of alcohol. Eric Burdon was on his big acid scene then, but Jimi would just say, 'Oh, he's an acid freak,' and put that whole scene down. It



wasn't until the time of the second album that I realised he had in fact been taking it. He'd split for a couple of days, and I realised he was on acid. At that time everybody thought it would sort out their problems. I took it eight times and was spaced out for 18 months. Half way through *Axis: Bold As Love* he was dropping it every day. I told him he'd have to be straight some of the time. At first I thought I would give him a new

slant to his lyrics, but he'd lose his temper.

"There were so many people hanging around him, he couldn't be himself. We had an argument about it, and he said, 'Okay, no more.' Then someone would turn up at the studio with a bag of goodies and pour some more down his throat. Mike Jeffery turned up at the studio as well and stuck his oar in. Things began to deteriorate.



"There was a dreadful atmosphere in the studio, which was full of hangers-on. We did six tracks for the Electric Ladyland album, and nobody was ready to compromise anymore. All I was doing was sitting there collecting a percentage. So I said, 'Let's call it a day.' That was late '68."

Chas ceased to be Jimi's producer and manager, but he knew what was happening.

"There were a few heavy incidents. He smashed up a place in Sweden and hit a girl in Los Angeles. He smashed up two cars in LA in one week. He went through a weird period. He wouldn't listen to anybody. And I had no way of saying anything. He was tearing himself apart for no apparent reason. I wasn't wanted anymore, so I split and flew back to England.

"After seven months I saw him in Gothenburg, Sweden, and he asked me to take over the act again.

"I never heard any more about him for three months until two days before he died. He asked me to produce for him again. He rang me again on the Thursday and we got to discussing the design for a cover. He said he was going to America to pick up some tapes for his next album. He was happy, but he had been recording for over a year and a half and hadn't really produced anything.

"Friday morning I took a train to Newcastle. When I got to the station I was met by my father who told me Jimi was dead. I couldn't believe it. I was numb for days. But somehow I wasn't

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Jimi Hendrix

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surprised. I don't believe for one minute he killed himself. That was out of the question. But something had to happen and there was no way of stopping it. You just get a feeling sometimes. It was as if the last couple of years had prepared us for it. It was like the message I had been waiting for.

"Subsequently I was told that four weeks before he died he had asked a dozen people to produce for him, which left me wondering whether or not he was serious in asking me back. On the 'phone he said the only recordings of his he liked had been *Axis* and *Experienced* and that nobody could tell him whether what he was putting down was good or bad.

"He had great difficulty in judging his own work. It wasn't through a lack of confidence. It was fear of lack of acceptance because his work was so personal to him. He put so much of himself into it. If a record wasn't liked it was a rejection of himself."

How close was his relationship with Mitch Mitchell and Noel Redding?

"He loved Mitch's drumming, but he didn't love Mitch. Mitch used to bug him. He got on well with Noel but used to criticise his playing. It was a love-hate relationship. Noel and Jimi in a dressing room was like a double act; with Jimi as the straight man. Noel was a strong-willed guy. If ever Jimi had an argument with Mitch, Mitch would go along with him. But Noel could always cool Jimi off. A couple of times Jimi could have murdered Noel but he never lifted a finger to hurt him.

"The performance at the Royal Albert Hall concert wasn't the Experience that I knew. It was like three individuals on stage. Mitch was playing drum solos on every number and Jimi was playing as if there were two strangers with him. I would have said that Jimi should have gone solo, but it would have meant a lot of business hangups. It was my honest opinion that he was best with the same instrumentation. I was dead against Buddy Miles coming into the band. He was a fine rock drummer but he certainly wasn't good enough for Jimi, or Billy Cox."

How did Jimi handle his money?

"He gave vast sums away. He gave some to his parents. And I remember once in Los Angeles he gave two girls three thousand dollars to go out shopping. He'd go out and buy nine guitars. Or he'd crack up a new Stingray, then go out to buy another and smash that up four days later. He just seemed to lose all sense of proportion. He spent un-

lievable sums of money.

"In Gothenburg in January '68 he had been in a big fight at his hotel and smashed up the place. I went to the jail in Gothenburg and he was sitting in a bare cell. He had been in the hospital first to have stitches put in two gashes in his hands. Then they put him in a cell. He had been absolutely out of his mind.

"I asked him what happened, but he didn't know himself and I never really got the full story. But I think Noel hit Jimi and Jimi laid out two cops and tried to jump out of the window. He had to pay a percentage of his weekly wage, and it cost him a fortune. He also had to pay damages to the hotel. But afterwards he carried on as if nothing had happened.

"When I split from them Noel had more money than the rest put together. Jimi took half and the others a quarter each. But Jimi would spend all his. He'd hire a suite of rooms at every hotel on the road, and have ten people round for steaks. Noel would stay with the roadies and save; success never seemed to change him. He was always the same happy little guy. And yet they'd have some bitter arguments. I'll never know why — it was so hard to take Noel seriously.

"I suppose the difference between Jimi and the group was that Mitch and Noel attached the greatest importance to gimmicks, whereas Jimi would spend time practicing with his wah-wah pedal to get new sounds, Mitch wanted bigger drum kits, or Noel would want an eight string bass guitar. It's trite to say there are pressures on musicians, but there were a million on Hendrix."

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Mott

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the effect these disruptions had on the band. "We were weak, very weak. But then suddenly one morning I woke up and I was raging angry. We knew exactly what everyone was thinking — 'Oh, Bowie's gone, it's all over' — and that made us mad as hell. And it was the anger that got us through. Out of the anger the writing came, the album came, everything came. This is a funny band. Just when it looks like it's all over, something happens to pull it all together. But this is the first time that we actually solved our own problems."

The first problem to be settled was an album. Many producers were discussed (and they even went so far as to work out a couple times with Roy Wood), but they wound up keeping it to themselves. And it's where their "we'll show you" fury was vented most effect-

ively. "I psyched up against Bowie for the album," admits Ian. "I mean, I even told him about it. And he's completely knocked out by what's happened. You see, his only intention ever was to help. DeFries might've used us, but David only wanted to give us a hand."

Whatever the impetus, *Mott* (as the album is called) is an impressive accomplishment. Where there were always a couple of songs that literally jumped off every previous Mott album, this one is the picture of consistency. It's one of the first new-age classics, and without it your record collection is lacking indeed.

Their control over their affairs tightened drastically, a process that had begun with their association with Main-Man. According to Ian, "What happened with Bowie was a revolution in efficiency. His imagination could come out of his head and actually be done, and it was the first time that had happened. It never happened in the past. It's always been thought that people in bands couldn't comprehend business. But there are so many ways you can be wanked around — you can take our career as an example — that they force you into a situation where you have to see the whole picture if you want to survive. And now you can go in and tell them. Like when we were there with Atlantic, it never dawned on me to go up there and say, 'Look you idiots, you're doing it all wrong.' I'd do it now, and I will. Nobody's gonna mess us up anymore.

"When we were in LA, I met Keith Moon for the first time. And I said to him, 'How did you get that house and all those cars you've got, 'cause you're only the drummer and don't get songwriting royalties or anything.' Because he lives to excess, that guy; he's just thrown hundreds of thousands of quid here and there and everywhere. And he turned around and laid this incredible 40 minute rap on me. I couldn't believe that this was the same Mooney who everyone thinks is just a looner.

"I didn't know what he was talking about. And then it slowly dawned on me that we had to have the same kind of awareness. That we had to start walking out on people, and being nasty if that's what it takes to get things done. We'd always been nice, and had done exactly what we were told to do. And where had it gotten us? And since that day, we've never looked back."

This doesn't mean that Mott were magically transformed into a crew of cigar-chomping, fire-breathing monsters. It simply means that they finally acknowledged enough pride and concern at what they were doing to say that it wouldn't be done unless it was done right.